



Col. R. L. Brewer, Jr., his wife, and several friends spent a few days at Nix's Club in the summer of 1933. Pictured here is his yacht the Leila B. at the clubhouse. The picture was provided by the only child in that group, Evelyn Daughtry.

GONE WITH THE WIND

Hurricane Isabel blew through Suffolk last September knocking down trees of great size, peeling back metal roofs, and generally leaving a large mark on the landscape. There are, for the information of our out-of-town members, plenty of tarp-covered roofs still to be seen. Some small houses and outbuildings were completely demolished. Some chimneys are still waiting for masons to rebuild them. There were two buildings lost in the storm that are not likely to be replaced. Nix's Club and the Ballard cottage stood in the Nansemond River on either side of the Godwin Bridge on Route 17. They were lost to the storm of 2003.

On a beautiful October afternoon in 1994, members of SNHS had the pleasure of taking a cruise on the Nansemond River. About thirty people departed from Bennett's Creek Marina on two handsome vessels. One belonged to SNHS member Angus Hines and the other to a friend from Norfolk.

Our destination was Nix's Club in the Nansemond River where we would have a picnic lunch. The river house had been built about 1906 by a group of Suffolk businessmen as a pleasure club. It was named for John Nix, a produce merchant who owned a nearby wharf and allowed the cottage builders to work from his pier. In those days the Nansemond was full of commercial traffic. The Nansemond River oyster and fishing business was strong and produce farmers used the river to move their products to market.

In 1914 several Suffolk families bought Nix's Club. The September 26, 2003 issue of The Virginian Pilot named the Birdsongs, the McLemores, the Taylors, the Godwins, the

Pinners, and the Ponds. Most, but not all of the families, were neighbors on Pinner Street. Most were involved in the peanut business in Suffolk.

In August of 1933, three generations of the Birdsong family had gone to stay at the river house to celebrate Thomas Henry Birdsong's birthday. There were no weather reports in those days, no television, and not many radio stations. So there was no warning about the coming storm. No warning, that is, except an eerie pink sky the day before, according to SNHS member Evelyn Daughtry.

On our 1994 trip, we had with us Yancey Birdsong who was a young wife and mother-to-be in 1933. Mary Helen Macklin Rawls and Martha Macklin Smith, sisters (and Birdsongs on their mother's side) who had been 10 and 12 years old in that year were with us as well. The three sat in old Nix's Clubhouse and remembered that frightening night.



October 1994 - L to R: Mary Helen Rawls, Yancy Birdsong and Martha Smith sat in Nix's Club and told of the storm of 1933.

The river had been choppy in the daylight hours, but as the day drew to a close, the river rose higher and higher. Thomas Henry Birdsong directed the family to open the doors on the four sides of the cottage. The family climbed upon the lockers that served as closets and watched and listened as the river rushed through the house. When daylight came the water started to recede. The boat that had carried them to the house was gone, but they hailed a fisherman, Captain McNeil, who had ventured out early. He carried them to land. All were safe.

This past September another storm came. This one was named Isabel and she meant business. Nix's Club and the 1930's era Ballard clubhouse on the other side of the bridge, both of which have weathered many storms, were finally lost to Isabel. So many local people have fond memories of hospitality and camaraderie enjoyed in those houses over the years.

Those Nansemond River sentinels- particularly, for us, Nix's Club- will be missed. Our sincere thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Richard Davis, the last owners, for allowing members of the Historical Society to be part of the long history of Nix's Club.

From The Virginian Pilot, March 8, 2004. About the storm of 1933.

No Doppler radar saw it coming; no TV weatherman drew its course across a screen. Locals noticed the surf running rough and a nor'easter was predicted. Mere hours before landfall, Norfolk and Princess Anne County ordered evacuations of Ocean View, Willoughby Spit and the Oceanfront.

As the eye of the hurricane passed directly over Norfolk and 9 a.m. on Aug. 23, winds changed direction, and began to push water into the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. Constricted by the narrowing channels of rivers and streams, urged relentlessly from behind by gusts up to 88 mph, the water formed a wave of increasing height and savagery that surged out of the banks and across the ground.



Enjoying the river from Nix's porch. Summer 1933



A nap on a sunny afternoon. Summer 1933



Nix Club House 1933



A page from Evelyn Daughtry's scrapbook, 1933. In the group pictures Evelyn's on the top step. Col. and Mrs. Brewer are shown bottom right.

Mailbag

Dear Sir:

I noticed your article on Suffolk baseball in the most recent issue of the SNHS newsletter, and thought you might like some more information about professional baseball in Suffolk. I have an interest in the history of baseball and have been researching (slowly!) the teams that played in Suffolk.

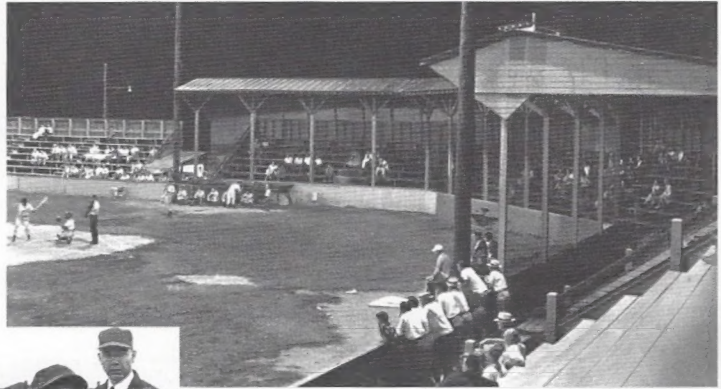
Records of minor league baseball prior to 1900 are difficult to find, at best, especially since I am not aware of any source for a Suffolk newspaper prior to those held by the Morgan Library. There may well have been a minor league team here before 1900, but I have not been able to find any record of it.

The first minor league team in Suffolk was in 1908, in the four-team Old Dominion League. It is not clear that this team ever actually played, and if it did, it is likely that the league quickly folded as there is no record of the games.

Suffolk did have a team in the Virginia League in 1915. This team, known as the Suffolk Nuts, did quite well, finishing third. World War I caused a significant disruption in professional baseball, and there was no team until 1919, when the Nuts were reinstated. They played from 1919-1921, led by manager Gabby Street, but never did very well, finishing last or close to last each year. This league included teams from places like Norfolk and Richmond, and the Suffolk team was simply outclassed against this level of competition. They played in Athletic Park (I am not sure where this was), which is described in Chrisman's book as being very dilapidated. The team lost money and dropped out of the league in January 1922.

While semi-professional teams played here intermittently thereafter, a recognized professional team did not reemerge until 1948. At that time the Suffolk Goobers became a member of the reorganized Virginia League, which also included teams from Petersburg, Lawrenceville, Franklin, Blackstone, and Emporia (Hopewell, Elizabeth City, and Edenton were later in the league as well). In their first season, 1948, they finished in first place, led by manager Jim Steinecke, though they lost in the playoffs to Blackstone. They continued to do well, playing at both Smith Street Park and Peanut Park (the diamond, but not the stands, still located just south of downtown on U.S. 13), making the playoffs 3 of the 4 years the "new" league existed.

By 1951, minor league baseball nationwide was in serious trouble, both due to the advent of televised major league games, and due to improved roads, which allowed people to travel farther for entertainment. Many teams and leagues failed in the 1950's, and the Virginia League was no exception. The Virginia League folded after the 1951 season, ending the presence of professional baseball in Suffolk.



A small crowd at a night game at Peanut Park in the early 1950's



Some Suffolk High School baseball players and coach 1950 at Peanut Park

L to R- Craig Matthews, Cotton Holland (kneeling), Martin Carter, Bobby Trump, and Cap'n Dick White- Bobby played professional ball for the Jacksonville Braves for two years after graduation.

Incidentally, as part of my research on this topic, I would be very interested in talking with anyone who played for, worked for, or has information about the team when it played here. (I would be interested in a source for early Suffolk newspapers, if one exists.) If you know of anyone like this, please let me know.

Several references that include information about Suffolk baseball are available. These are listed below:

The History of the Virginia League by David Chrisman, Maverick Publications, 1988, has the most information in a single source about baseball in Suffolk I have found.

Ballparks of North America by Michael Benson, McFarland Publishing, 1989.

Bush League by Robert Objoski, MacMillan Publishing, 1975.

The Story of Minor League Baseball edited by Finch, Addington, and Morgan, The Stoneman Press, 1953.

The Suffolk News-Herald, The Portsmouth Star, and The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot are all useful sources.

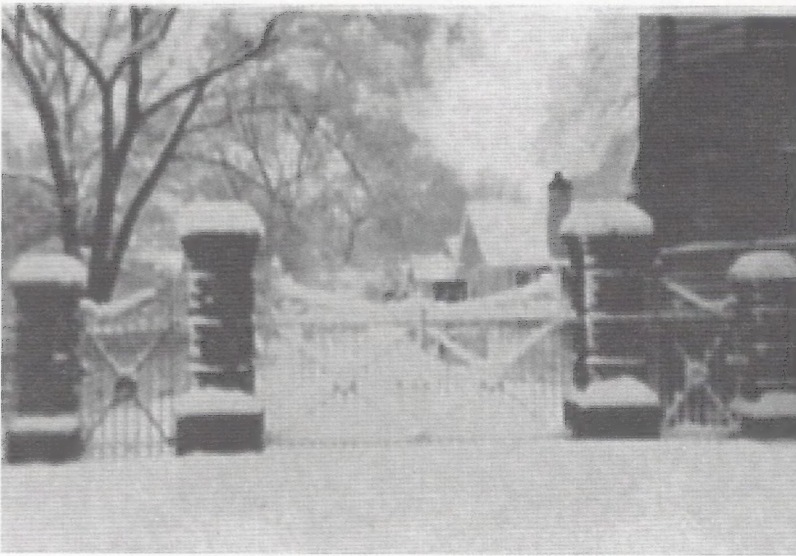
I hope this sheds a bit more light on an interesting, but now mostly forgotten, piece of Suffolk's history.

Sincerely,

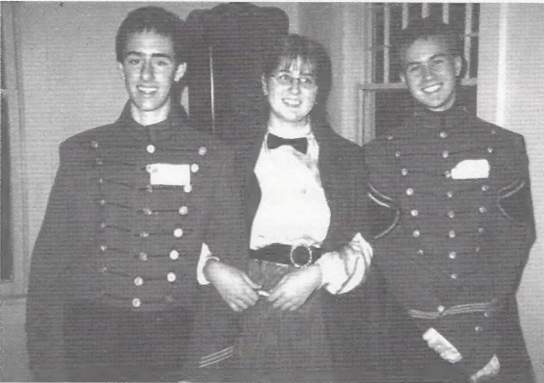
Edward Simmer

Information may be sent to Mr. Simmer c/o SNHS.

Candlelight Tour 2003



College Court in the 1940's. Thanks to SNHS member Doris Godbey Wallace



Frank George (l) and Chris Beacham (r) appeared as Suffolk Military Academy students, while Holly Anne Hillard (center) represented a young lady from the Finney School.



Joe Barlow, dressed as a conductor, welcomed guests to the Train Station for Candlelight Tour 2003.



Doris Godbey Wallace and Jim Bob Laine, former College Court residents, chatted with Ravis McBride Carter who lived in the Finney School apartments once. They are shown at the Meehan residence.



Susan Garrett strikes a pose in her flapper costume in the kitchen of the Luther home.

Over 500 guests attended our Candlelight Tour last December 6 and 7. One guest, Doris Godbey Wallace, came from Hickory, North Carolina to see her old family home, #4 College Court. She had wept at its condition a few years ago, but this time she was all smiles. I, for one, was pleased and proud as could be (especially on Sunday night when there was a larger crowd and slightly higher temperatures) for any part our organization played in the College Court comeback. The full moon over the candlelit College Court was a beautiful picture to me. Thanks to the homeowners, the decorators, hostess chairmen, the hosts and hostesses, the publicity girls, bake sale chairman, the bakers, the flutist, the bag piper, the quilters, the linen lady, student helpers, the advertisers, Main Street Antiques, Smithfield Antiques Emporium, Starr Motors,

the City of Suffolk and the auxiliary policemen, our ticket salesman, our fire barrel and candle tenders, and everyone else (especially our guests) who made our event a great success. Thanks especially to Mickey Garcia who was brave enough and smart enough to take on the College Court project and to Joy Luther, the pioneer homebuyer who was there ahead of Mickey. By the way, every house at College Court is sold now.

Congratulations to Barbara Morris who won the pedal car and Pam Host who won the piano music CDs. Bravo to all.

-Sue



Joe Delendek warmed up at the Train Station before playing at College Court each day at dusk.

Over the Line

Louise Lyon, editor of the Gates County Historical Society newsletter, is interested in writing an article about Gates County people who were prominent in Suffolk in the twentieth century especially in the 1940's and 1950's.

Through most of the last century (and before and since), Suffolk was the commercial hub of a large rural area that included Gates County. Many Suffolkians have Gates County roots (as General Laurence Baker did) and just as many Gates County natives have Nansemond County roots.

If you have someone to suggest, please write to Mrs. Louise Lyon, 35 Corner High Road, Eure, North Carolina 27935.

Train Station News



Parker Suffolk, VA.
Brig. General Laurence S. Baker

By the time this letter reaches our readers, the Train Station will have been given a portrait of Confederate General Laurence S. Baker, a Gates County native. After the War, this West Point graduate lived on Main Street in Suffolk and worked at our station until his death in 1907. The portrait is a gift to the Historical Society from the Tom Smith Camp, Sons of Confederate Veterans.

The photograph seen here was taken of another picture by a photographer named James Parker whose studio was at 3 1/2 N. Main Street above Marmaduke Jones's men's clothing store (on the northeast corner of the intersection of Main and Washington Streets). This is the site of a later bank building that now houses the Suffolk School Board offices.

Wed., Dec. 17, 2003, Commemorative Edition, Outer Banks Sentinel, News items that appeared in newspaper in 1903. This was sent to us by SNHS member, Joyce Trump.

Increase of Railroads Steady

The Suffolk & Carolina Rail Company has sent three officials to Manteo to look at the possibility of beginning a steamboat line between Manteo and Elizabeth City.

The idea is not so far-fetched as it might at first appear.

Railroad lines have been steadily increasing since 1895 and there are now more than 200,000 miles of line across the nation.

In 1902, 6,026 additional miles were added, exclusive of second track, sidings and all electric lines. In 1901, 5,368 miles of line were added and that of 1900 was 4,894.

Just last year, Oklahoma led the list of States and Territories in railroad building with 550 miles, followed by the Indian Territory, which was fourth with 363 miles.

Postscripts

From our 2003 Good Old Summertime issue



Bill and Margaret Taylor, children of Mr. & Mrs. Harry P. Taylor at Conan Beach c.1933. Thanks to SNHS members Mr. & Mrs. Joe Barlow.

Michael Babb gave the following newspaper article from the Suffolk News Herald published 1950.

Gurley Named 'Conan'

Ever wonder why Conan Beach was called Conan?

Simple enough when you analyze the word Conan - Co for Cohoon's Creek, which supplied

the water, and Nan for Nansemond River, into which the Cohoon's Creek water flowed.

Presto, Conan!

This bit of historic lore was supplied by the man who named the now-flooded swimming spot about four miles out of Suffolk - R. Clyde Gurley, a Suffolk printer.

Gurley said that when he was scout-master of the Oxford Methodist Church Bay Scout troop back in the middle 1920's, the troop conceived the idea of cleaning out the Conan spot for a swimming hole.

"Since we did the work, we were given the privilege of naming," Gurley said. "I suggested 'Conan,' combining the first syllables of Cohoon and Nansemond, and that's what it was."

"Carr Hill, president and treasurer of Ballard and Smith, and Jimmy Parker, president of First Federal Savings and Loan Association, were assistant scoutmasters of the Oxford troop," Gurley said.

Correction

Conan Beach was owned and operated by Bauldie Parker (1873-1944) and his wife, Julia (1876-1958).



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Just a Note on the Postcard Book

This postcard was recently sent to us by Horace B. Phillips of Hardeeville, South Carolina. It shows the rear of the Withers house (214 Pinner Street) after a snow (c. 1930). The house to the right is the Birdsong House.



Arcadia Publishing Company had sold almost 1,200 copies of Suffolk in Vintage Postcards as of 3/30/04. Though SNHS benefits most if you buy at the train station, it is sold at many locations including Barnes and Noble. The book is in its second printing.

Thanks again to Henry Frazier and Tommy O'Connor (shown with Sue Woodward) for making this project possible.



Specials Awards and Honors

Since our last regular newsletter three of our members have received special awards related primarily to the field of historic preservation.

In October the Great Bridge Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution presented the organization's new award for historic preservation to Deme Panagopulos. We believe Deme was the first person to be given the award in Virginia. Certainly he is the first recipient in the Tidewater area. The Panagopulos live in Great Bridge but work in Suffolk where Deme is overseeing the completion of the Luke House, his third Main Street (or near Main Street) project.

In November Betsy Brothers was honored at the awards dinner of the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects. She received the Historic Monument Avenue and Fan District Foundation Award for Historic Preservation. Betsy has been the guiding force in so many projects over the last few years. She is currently at the helm of the Suffolk Center for Cultural Arts project for old Suffolk High School.

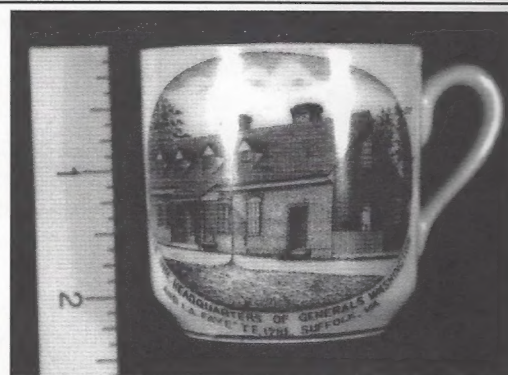
In February Sue Woodward was named First Citizen by the Suffolk Rotary Club.

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Last September friends of SNHS, Suffolk native and architectural historian Bill Frazier and his wife Kathleen, architect, of Frazier and Associates in Staunton, were recognized by Southern Living Magazine with their Southern Home Award for Historic Preservation. The award was for the Fraziers' work on Mount Ida plantation, which was built in Buckingham County in 1795 and then was moved in recent years to a farm outside Charlottesville. Bill contributed an article about his grandfather's home to our newsletter two years ago.

An Interesting Puzzle

The cup shown has recently come to light. It is thought to be a demitasse because of its small size. It is decorated with an illustration of the Alms House formerly located on the northwest corner of Main and Mahan Streets and is erroneously labeled "Castle Inn, Headquarters of Generals Washington and La Fayette, 1781, Suffolk, Va." It has a thin gold line around the rim, around the base and down the handle. On the bottom, the manufacturers label reads "Made in Germany for Norfleet & Bro., Suffolk, Va."



It is thought that perhaps this cup was made to be sold in Suffolk as a souvenir at the time of the Jamestown Exposition, but it raises several questions. For instance, was it part of a set with a teapot, creamer and sugar? Did the other pieces of the set have different illustrations? Surely they did. And the most important question of all—does anyone in the society know of any other pieces or any information regarding their sale?

If you can shed any light on this interesting puzzle, please drop a line to SNHS, P.O. Box 1255, Suffolk, VA 23439 or call 539-2781 (the Dawson House).

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Anonymous
Mary Norman Looney
Mrs. Joseph E. Manno
Mr. and Mrs. Richard L. Pond, Jr.
Jean S. Walker
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph N. Webb

Cornerstone

The event that is commemorated in this picture is the laying of the cornerstone of the Methodist Church in 1914. The building, known today as the Main Street United Methodist Church, was completed in 1916.

There is more to be seen in the picture, however. The house at the right in the row of houses across the street was a former

commercial building that became the home of General Lawrence Baker and his family when they came to Suffolk after the War Between the States.



Do You Know?


Do you know the location of cemeteries in Suffolk (old Nansemond County)? If so, please call Mrs. Carl R. Saunders (562-4403).



Mrs. Mary Draper's grave is in an out-of-the-way spot, forgotten by most of the world. Photo from John Johnson.

St. Paul's Episcopal Church had been built in this block in the 1890's. It's steeple is just visible through the trees behind the Baker house. The Bakers attended St. Paul's. There is a memorial window for General Baker in the south wall of the church and a memorial window for the Confederate dead in the chapel.

The Baker property was eventually purchased by St. Paul's Church and the house was demolished. The land is part of the walled churchyard now.

SUFFOLK NANSEMOND  HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. Box 1255
Suffolk, Virginia 23439-1255

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